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clearly pointed at marriage, when movements of cattle from kraal to kraal are equivalent to lines on a genealogical chart. It is also emphasized by division of sacrificial meat among agnatic and cognatic relatives.

The importance of cattle in Nuer life and thought is further exemplified in personal names. Men are frequently addressed by names that refer to the form and colour of their favourite oxen, and women take names from oxen and from the cows they milk. Even small boys call one another by ox-names when playing together in the pastures, a child usually taking his name from the bull-calf of the cow he and his mother milk. Often a man receives an ox-name or cow-name at birth. Sometimes the name of a man which is handed down to posterity is his ox-name and not his birth-name. Hence a Nuer genealogy may sound like an inventory of a kraal. The linguistic identification of a man with his favourite ox cannot fail to affect his attitude to the beast, and to Europeans the custom is the most striking evidence of the pastoral mentality of the Nuer.

Since cattle are a Nuer's most cherished possession being an essential food-supply and the most important social asset, it is easy to understand why they play a foremost part in ritual. A man establishes contact with the ghosts and spirits through his cattle. If one is able to obtain the history of each cow in a kraal, one obtains at the same time not only an account of all the kinship links and affinities of the owners but also of all their mystical connexions. Cows are dedicated to the spirits of the lineages of the owner and of his wife and to any personal spirit that has at some time possessed either of them. Other beasts are dedicated to ghosts of the dead. By rubbing ashes along the back of a cow or ox one may get into touch with the spirit or ghost associated with it and ask it for assistance. Another way of communicating with the dead and with spirits is by sacrifice, and no Nuer ceremony is complete without the sacrifice of a ram, he-goat, or ox.

We have seen in a brief survey of some Nuer institutions and customs that most of their social behaviour directly concerns their cattle. A fuller study of their culture would show everywhere the same dominant interest in cattle, e.g. in their folklore. They are always talking about their beasts. I used some-

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times to despair that I never discussed anything with the young men but live stock and girls, and even the subject of girls led inevitably to that of cattle. Start on whatever subject I would, and approach it from whatever angle, we would soon be speaking of cows and oxen, heifers and steers, rams and sheep, he-goats and she-goats, calves and lambs and kids. I have already indicated that this obsession—for such it seems to an outsider—is due not only to the great economic value of cattle but also to the fact that they are links in numerous social relationships. Nuer tend to define all social processes and relationships in terms of cattle. Their social idiom is a bovine idiom.

Consequently he who lives among Nuer and wishes to understand their social life must first master a vocabulary referring to cattle and to the life of the herds. Such complicated discussions as those which take place in negotiations of marriage, in ritual situations, and in legal disputes can only be followed when one understands the difficult cattle-terminology of colours, ages, sexes, and so forth.

Important though horticultural and piscatorial pursuits are in Nuer economy, pastoral pursuits take precedence because cattle not only have nutritive utility but have a general social value in other respects. I have mentioned a few situations in which this value is manifested, but have not recorded every role of cattle in Nuer culture, for they are significant in many social processes, including some I have mentioned, which lie outside the limited scope of this book. It seemed necessary to give an introductory sketch on these lines in order that the reader might understand that Nuer devotion to the herdsman's art is inspired by a range of interests far wider than simple need for food, and why cattle are a dominant value in their lives. We shall ask later how this value is related to environmental conditions and how far the two, taken together, help us to explain some characteristics of Nuer political structure.

II

Before the present century Nuer were far richer in cattle than they are now and it is probable that they cultivated less millet. Their stock has been impaired by repeated outbreaks of rinderpest, which still decimate the herds. It was probably more

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It is not necessary to add more examples of cattle-terms and their uses to demonstrate that we are dealing with a galaxy of words in the arrangement of which a thesaurus of some magnitude might be compiled. I need only emphasize that this intricate and voluminous vocabulary is not technical and departmental but is employed by every one and in manifold situations of ordinary social life. I have only treated a fragment of a fragment of the linguistic field relating to cattle. I could enter into further detail, but, at best, I have only surveyed, and in an amateur way, that field, which invites broader and more specialist research. My purpose has been to draw attention to it and to show how a study of the dominant interest of Nuer might be approached from this angle. The subject is necessarily vast, because, as we have seen, it is not possible to discuss with Nuer their daily affairs, social connexions, ritual acts, or, indeed, any subject, without reference to cattle which are the core round which daily life is organized and the medium through which social and mystical relations are expressed. Nor is Nuer interest in cattle confined to their practical uses and social functions, but is displayed in their plastic and poetic arts, in which they are the chief theme. The over-emphasis on cattle is thus strikingly shown in language, which, moreover, by compelling reference to cattle, whatever be the subject of speech, continually focuses attention on them and makes them the superlative value of Nuer life.

IX

Another way in which Nuer engrossment in cattle can be illustrated—our last exemplification thereof—is by noting how readily and frequently they fight about them, for people risk their lives for what they greatly value and in terms of those values.

At the present time cattle are the main cause of hostility towards, and suspicion of, the Government, not so much on account of present taxation as of earlier tax-gathering patrols which were little more than cattle raids and of the avowedly plundering expeditions of the Egyptian Government era that preceded them. Nuer war with the Dinka has been almost entirely offensive and directed towards appropriation of herds and annexation of grazing grounds. Cattle have also been the

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chief occasion of strife among Nuer themselves. Indeed, after a successful raid on Dinka stock there is often further fighting over the booty. Moreover, Nuer tribes raid one another for cattle. Thus the Leek raid the Jikany, Rengyan, and other western tribes, and cattle raids are of common occurrence along tribal boundaries elsewhere, for to 'steal' (*kwal*) cattle from another tribe is regarded as laudable. Within a tribe, also, fighting frequently results from disputes about cattle between its sections and between individuals of the same section, even of the same village or homestead. Nuer fight on slight provocation and most willingly and frequently when a cow is at stake. On such an issue close kinsmen fight and homes are broken up. When ownership of cattle is in dispute Nuer throw over caution and propriety, showing themselves careless of odds, contemptuous of danger, and full of guile. As my Nuer servant once said to me: 'You can trust a Nuer with any amount of money, pounds and pounds and pounds, and go away for years and return and he will not have stolen it; but a single cow—that is a different matter.'

Nuer say that it is cattle that destroy people, for 'more people have died for the sake of a cow than for any other cause'. They have a story which tells how, when the beasts broke up their community and each went its own way and lived its own life, Man slew the mother of Cow and Buffalo. Buffalo said she would avenge her mother by attacking men in the bush, but Cow said that she would remain in the habitations of men and avenge her mother by causing endless disputes about debts, bride-wealth, and adultery, which would lead to fighting and deaths among the people. So this feud between Cow and Man has gone on from time immemorial, and day by day Cow avenges the death of her mother by occasioning the death of men. Hence Nuer say of their cattle, 'They will be finished together with mankind', for men will all die on account of cattle and they and cattle will cease together.

It must not, however, be supposed that Nuer live in continuous turmoil: the very fact that they are prepared to resist any infringement of their rights in cattle induces prudence in the relations between persons who regard themselves as members of the same group. It may be said, furthermore, that the great

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vulnerability of cattle coupled with the extensive living-space required for them are compatible only with a far recognition of conventions in the settlement of disputes, or, in other words, the existence of a tribal organization embracing a large territory, and of some feeling of community over yet larger areas.

Fighting about ownership of cattle and seizing cattle for what are claimed as debts and compensation for losses are of a somewhat different order to raiding for cattle over which no rights, other than the power of the strong, are asserted. War against foreign peoples, as distinct from warfare within a tribe, is almost entirely for plunder. Nuer war against the Dinka, therefore, differs from most primitive warfare in that its primary object is acquisition of wealth, for cattle are a form of wealth that not only lasts a long time and reproduces itself, but is, also, easily seized and transported. Furthermore, it enables invaders to live on the country without commissariat. Crops and dwellings can be destroyed, but cattle can be confiscated and taken home. This quality, which has given pastoral peoples a bias in favour of the arts of war rather than the arts of peace, has meant that the Nuer are not entirely dependent on their own cattle, but can augment their herds and restore the ravages of rinderpest, and have, in fact, for a long time increased their stock, and hence supplemented their food-supply, by raiding; a condition that has shaped their character, economy, and political structure. Skill and courage in fighting are reckoned the highest virtues, raiding the most noble, as well as the most profitable, occupation, and some measure of political agreement and unity a necessity.

We hasten to add that an explanation of warfare between Nuer and Dinka by reference to cattle and pastures alone is too simple a reduction. Hostility is expressed in terms of cattle, and desire for cattle accounts for some peculiarities of the struggle and some characteristics of the political organizations involved in it, but the struggle itself can only be fully understood as a structural process and we present it as such later.

We now pass to a brief examination of the oecological system of which Nuer and their cattle form part to discover the conditions in which cattle-husbandry is practised and how far its practice in a certain environment influences political structure.

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Here we make only two observations of a more general order. (1) Although the Nuer have a mixed pastoral-horticultural economy their country is more suitable for cattle husbandry than for horticulture, so that the environmental bias coincides with the bias of their interest and does not encourage a change in the balance in favour of horticulture. If it were not for rinderpest—a recent introduction—it might be possible to live a purely pastoral life, but, as we shall see later, a purely horticultural life would be precarious. (2) Nuer cannot, except in a few favoured spots, live in one place throughout the year. The floods drive them and their herds to seek the protection of higher ground. Absence of water and pasture on this higher ground compels them to move during the drought. Hence their life is of necessity migratory, or, more strictly, transhumant. A further reason that urges them to change their abode according to the seasons is their inability at the present time to subsist solely on the products of their cattle. A milk and meat diet has to be supplemented by grain and fish; and whereas the most suitable place for cultivation of millet is inland, on the edge of slightly elevated ground, fish are found in rivers which are generally distant from these elevated stretches.

II

Excess or insufficiency of water is the first problem that faces Nuer. It is essential that cattle should be protected from the water that covers the country in the rains, for they quickly get diseases of the hoof if they have to stand in water for long periods. Village sites are selected on the only spots affording such protection to man and beast: patches of slightly higher ground. When the rains have ceased water supplies near villages are soon exhausted, because, naturally, the highest and driest sites have been selected for building, and it becomes necessary to move to pools, lakes, lagoons, marshes, and rivers. Owing to the vast rivers that traverse Nuerland and the thorough irrigation they give to the country through a network of channels there is seldom difficulty about finding surface water, though people may have to go far to obtain it. Only in parts of Lou, Gaawar, and Eastern Jikany, as far as is known, are they regularly forced to dig wells in the beds of streams at the height of the

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The balanced opposition of political segments is, we believe, largely maintained by the institution of the feud which permits a state of latent hostility between local communities, but allows also their fusion in a larger group. We say that the hostility is latent because even when a feud is being prosecuted there is no uninterrupted endeavour to exact vengeance, but the kinsmen of the dead may take any opportunity that presents itself to accomplish their purpose; and, also, because even when compensation has been accepted the sore rankles and the feud may, in spite of settlement, break out again, for Nuer recognize that in sentiment a feud goes on for ever. The leopard-skin chief does not rule and judge, but acts as mediator through whom communities desirous of ending open hostility can conclude an active state of feud. The feud, including the role played in it by the chief, is thus a mechanism by which the political structure maintains itself in the form known to us.

The leopard-skin chief may also act as mediator in disputes concerning ownership of cattle, and he and the elders on both sides may express their opinion on the merits of a case. But the chief does not summon the defendants, for he has neither court nor jurisdiction and, moreover, has no means of compelling compliance. All he can do is to go with the plaintiff and some elders of his community to the home of the defendant and to ask him and his kinsmen to discuss the matter. Only if both sides are willing to submit to arbitration can it be settled. Also, although the chief, after consultation with the elders, can give a verdict, this verdict is reached by general agreement and in a large measure, therefore, arises from an acknowledgement by the defendant's or plaintiff's party that the other party has justice on its side. It is, however, very seldom that a chief is asked to act as mediator, and there is no one else who has authority to intervene in disputes, which are settled by other than legal methods.

In the strict sense of the word, the Nuer have no law. There is no one with legislative or juridical functions. There are conventional payments considered due to a man who has suffered certain injuries—adultery with his wife, fornication with his daughter, theft, broken limbs, &c.—but these do not make a legal system, for there is no constituted and impartial authority who decides on the rights and wrongs of a dispute and there is no external power to enforce such a decision were it given. If a man has right on his side, and, in virtue of that, obtains the support of his kinsmen and

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they are prepared to use force, he has a good chance of obtaining what is due to him, if the parties live near to one another. The usual way of obtaining one's due is to go to the debtor's kraal and take his cattle. To resist is to run the risk of homicide and feud. It seems that whether, and how, a dispute is settled depends very largely on the relative positions of the persons concerned in the kinship and age-set systems and the distance between their communities in tribal structure. In theory, one can obtain redress from any member of one's tribe, but, in fact, there is little chance of doing so unless he is a member of one's local community and a kinsman. The force of 'law' varies with the position of the parties in political structure, and thus Nuer 'law' is essentially relative, like the structure itself.

During the year I spent with the Nuer, I never heard a case being conducted, either before an individual or before a council of elders, and I received the impression that it is very rare for a man to obtain redress except by force or threats of force. And if the Nuer has no law, likewise he lacks government. The leopard-skin chief is not a political authority and the 'Man of the Cattle' and other ritual agents (totemic specialists, rain-makers, fetich-owners, magicians, diviners, &c.) have no political status or functions, though they may become prominent and feared in their locality. The most influential men in a village are generally the heads of joint families, especially when they are rich in cattle, of strong character, and members of the aristocratic clan. But they have no clearly defined status or function. Every Nuer, the product of a hard and equalitarian upbringing, deeply democratic, and easily roused to violence, considers himself as good as his neighbour; and families and joint families, whilst co-ordinating their activities with those of their fellow villagers, regulate their affairs as they please. Even in raids, there is very little organization, and leadership is restricted to the sphere of fighting and is neither institutionalized nor permanent. It is politically significant only when raids are controlled and organized by prophets. No Nuer specialists can be said to be political agents and to represent, or symbolize, the unity and exclusiveness of local groups, and, apart from the prophets, none can be said to have more than local prominence. All leaders, in this vague sense of influential persons in a locality, are adults and, except for an occasional prophetess, all are men.